

Speed. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Harold Schindler on January 18, 2019 in Delray Beach, Florida. Thank you, Mr. Schindler for agreeing to speak with us today--

Thank you.

--to share your story, to share some of your experiences during the war and after. I'm going to start with the most basic questions, and from there we'll develop things. So my very first question is, can you tell me the date of your birth?

March 1, 1936.

March 1, 1936. And what was your name when you were born?

They used to call me Heniek, what is in Polish. In Hebrew, it's Channoch.

Channoch.

And I'm calling myself now Harold, because in English you do not have a "cha." So they could not pronounce "Channoch." They pronounce "Chanoak" or something like this.

So did you legally change your name to Harold?

Yes.

OK. About when was that?

When I became a citizen of the United States.

And that would have been what year?

About '71, '72.

OK. So for the English-speaking world, you are Harold Schindler.

Correct.

For a Yiddish-speaking world, you were Channoch or Heni?

Hainach. My father used to call me Hainach.

Hainach Schindler, yes?

Correct.

OK. Where were you born?

In Zgierz, which is close to Lodz.

About how far from Lodz would Zgierz be?

I would say about 5 miles?

OK. And what was Zgierz? Was it a town, was it a city?

It's a town.

It's a town. Was it a large town?

A pretty nice size, yeah.

Do you have memories of Zgierz?

The only memory what I have from Zgierz is when one morning when they knocked on our window, and they-- somebody who knocked on the window said the synagogue was on fire.

Ah. And you remember hearing that.

I was, I think, about three or four years old. What I remember from this is, when we all run out and see the building-- the synagogue was a two-story building--

Wood?

I don't know. I think it's wood, yes. And we saw the fire coming out from the windows.

Ah. Was Zgierz also a very Jewish town? Excuse us for a second.

I'm sorry, one quick second. I've just got to drop this down.

I'm getting excited when I'm talking about it, because I feel like a [INAUDIBLE], you know.

Oh, I know.

OK, set.

OK. Were we still rolling?

Yes.

OK. We'll talk about these things-- you know, about what did that mean that the synagogue was burning, and what time-- you know, what was going on at the time. But right now I'd like to focus more on your family, because we don't know about your family. So tell me, did you have brothers and sisters?

We were five children. I had an older sister, then another sister, and then the three brothers, three boys. I'm the youngest one in my family.

You're the youngest one.

I'm the baby of the family.

Ah. So tell me, what were your siblings' names, starting from the oldest?

Henye.

Henye was the oldest sister.

Henye is oldest sister. Linda.

Linda. Shraga.

Shraga. Dubi.

Dubi.

And myself, Channoch.

And you. Now, are these nicknames? Or--

No, no, no, this is their name by--

Their real names. So Henye, Linda, Shraga, Dubi, and Channoch.

Right.

Heni. And when was your oldest sister Henye born? Do you know?

In 1926.

OK. So there's a 10-year difference between the oldest and the youngest.

Right.

OK. And do you remember the dates of birth-- the years that your other sisters and brothers were born?

Another sister '28.

OK, Linda.

And Shraga, my oldest brother, is 1932. Dubi, '34, and I'm '36.

OK. So every two years.

Pardon me?

Every two years.

Correct.

Yeah. Let's talk about your mother and your father. What was your mother's first name?

Gila

Gila.

And my father used to call her Giela. But this is Gila.

Gila. And what was her maiden name?

I don't remember.

That's OK.

I know what-- I have some-- it's somewhere written, but I don't remember.

And your father's first name?

Jonah.

Jonah.

Right.

Jonah Schindler-- Jonah and Gila Schindler.

Correct.

All right. In Zgierz, were there many Jews in the town?

Yes.

About how large a community was it?

I don't know. Like I said, it was pretty nice community. But like, I left Poland, I was, I think, four years old.

So you wouldn't know it was-- OK. That's OK. How did your father make a living?

He was a shoemaker.

Aha. And did he have his own shop?

Yes.

And he made custom made shoes?

At that time, only makers make shoes. We did not have factories like this.

So did he have any help in his shop?

No.

It was all his own.

All his own.

And your parents, had they been born in Zgierz?

My mother yes. And my father was not far from Zgierz. I know the name, but I don't know-- it is very close to Zgierz.

OK. So it's close by. It might come to you. It might come to you. How did they meet? Do you know?

Matchmaker.

So it was an arranged marriage.

At that time-- you know, you're talking--

We're talking a hundred years ago.

That's right.

Yeah. So were both families very religious-- your mother's family and your father's?

My mother was very religious. My father was also, but not--

Not that much.

Right.

Did they both have lots of brothers and sisters?

My father had one brother and two sisters.

Did you know them?

No.

Do you know their names?

My uncle, my father's brother, Zalman.

Zalman.

The sisters I don't remember.

OK. And on your mother's side?

She's, I think, the only child.

Really?

Yeah.

That's unusual for those days.

Well, when I was born, I did not have no grandfather or grandmother.

On either side?

On either side.

So they had already passed away?

Correct.

What my father told me, that his father died when my father was about 12 or 14 years old.

OK. So he was still just reaching teenage-hood. He was still in many ways a child when his father died.

He was a child, correct.

Yeah. And on your mother's side, when did her parents die?

I don't know when. Because my name is after my mother's father. Even when my older brother, he did not have any grandparents at all, like me. They died very young.

OK. And do you know anything about your parents' early years and their childhoods? Did they tell you any stories of what their experiences were growing up?

Well, like I said, my father was, I think, between 12 and 14. He had to go out right away to work to help my mother-- to help-- yeah, my mother.

Your grandmother, you mean?

Yeah, my-- no.

If his father died when he was 14 years old--

Yeah. Yeah, to his mother, correct.

To his mother. He had to help his mother.

Right.

Had he been an oldest son, or was he--

He's the oldest one.

He was the oldest one. OK. And did you know-- so you didn't know either grandparents nor aunts, uncles from your father's side?

No.

OK. OK. And had his father been a shoemaker as well?

I guess so. Yes, I guess so.

You don't really know for sure.

I'm not so sure, but I think so, yes.

OK. Would you say that your family was well-off or not well-off?

No-- well, it was-- they were not really poor, but not really wealthy. Because what I remember, every summer my father used to rent in the mountains a place for, I know, a few weeks. And we always used to go there.

Mm-hmm. Well, that's-- that means that there was enough money to do that.

Well, he worked-- he was a hard worker.

Yeah. Do you-- even though you were little, do you remember seeing him in his shop?

Well, he worked from home. He did not have a shop. He worked from home. And no, I don't remember.

OK. So people would come to your home in order to get shoes.

Right. Repair, new ones, everything.

And do you remember any of that, of people coming to your home?

No, nah.

Do you remember anything of what your house looked like?

No.

OK.

No.

OK. So most, aside from that image of the synagogue burning--

Right, synagogue, I don't remember nothing.

You don't remember anything.

Right.

So it would be everything that somebody would have told you.

What my father used to tell me.

Was he a storyteller?

Pardon me?

Was he somebody who told stories, that he-- was he someone who shared his stories, his experiences?

Only my father.

Only your father.

Right.

Your mother did not?

Yeah. I lost my-- [CLEARS THROAT]

It's OK. We can cut for a second.

I lost my mother, I was five years old.

We will have to film that. We will have to film that, but here is-- here you go.

It's OK, it's OK.

For right now.

Let's start again.

Continue.

I will ask, and we'll move on. Are we filming?

Mm-hmm.

OK. So we paused for a moment, because I asked about these things. And why is it that your mother never told you stories?

Because like I said, I was five years old. She died in Siberia in Russia.

Ah. OK. So you hardly knew her.

Correct. Because we never-- my father went after the war in Moskva. And somebody stole everything, all the pictures and everything. After the war, we met somebody from our town, and they had a picture of my mother.

Oh, my goodness.

And that's why I still have a picture. And then we made the picture together, my father and my mother.

From that picture.

Thank you. Do you remember leaving Zgierz?

Yes.

Tell me, from your child's eyes, what happened? When you-- as a child, what do you remember happening when you left Zgierz?

OK. I have to go back about my father.

Then tell us about that.

When the war broke out, all the people from Zgierz went to the mayor of the town and said that we want to fight. And so the mayor said there's nothing to do. The only thing what you can do, go to Warschau and over there they will give you uniforms, because the Germans did not invade Warschau at the time. And they will give you a weapon.

So my father and the rest of the people went to Warschau. But it was already too late. Germany already invaded.

The only thing what I know is they went in a bunker, because the Germany had still bombed Warschau. After this, when they invaded Warsaw, they took all the-- they released all the Polish citizens. But the Jewish people, they marched them back from the town where they came.

Now, the Jewish people, they went by foot. The Germans eventually went on motorcycles or on vehicles. And anybody who did not go as not fast, they hit them. At the time, it was not so bad with the Germans that right away they shoot.

So after a few weeks, OK, they came back to the town. My father also came back to Zgierz to see-- to the family.

I see. OK.

And then my father and about another 40 or so Jewish men left Zgierz, because they want to see how to save themselves and, you know. And they got to Bialystok.

OK, that's in Eastern Poland.



Bialystok was already under the Russian control.

OK. Was Zgierz under Russian or under German--

No, German.

German control.

Right. They came to Bialystok. And they went-- it was night. They went to eat something, you know. Next morning my father said, I'm going back to Zgierz. The guys, all his friends said, what for?

He said, well, I have a wife, five kids. They said, so what? You left over there. You saw like hell. You're going back for your wife and the kids?

He said, without the wife and kids, what is life? They said we have over here a bunch of women and this. My father said, no, I have to go back. So here he start to go back. And at that time, Jews could not be outside from 10:00 to 5:00.

So this is a curfew.

Correct.

And this was in the Russian part or in the German part?

German. He went back to Zgierz. He went back to Zgierz.

Back to Zgierz, all right.

For the family. He got stopped by a German patrol what was over there, now that they had quite a few troops with them. And they took him--

They arrested him.

Right.

So the way-- he knew that if he is going with them, he's finished. So he had an idea what to do. They went-- when they passed like a forest, he made himself like he wanted to tie his shoes. The patrol went through, and he jumped away.

OK. So he ran away.

Between the trees. He ran away. Somehow, he managed to come home. It was at night.

Do you remember any of that?

This is what my father told me. This is what my father tells me. What is not over here is already-- you know. When he came home, he knocked on the door. My mother opened the door, and she said, where have you been? And he said, I was in Bialystok

So why you come back? He said, well, if not you, what is life?

Oh.

She-- [SCOFFS] so she said, what? I'm a queen? I have star on my head? You coming back for me? You already out over here. You know. He said, hey, that-- you know, I'm coming back for you and the kids. This is my family, this is my

life.

Next morning, eventually, we were all very happy and et cetera. And next morning, all the women come in who heard that my father's there. And they want to know what is happening to their husbands. Well, he said, they're still over there.

Meantime, a patrol came by and saw so many people over there. They came in and said, what's going on over here? My father said, well, the women have left their shoes. I'm a shoemaker. And they left this, and they come to pick it up.

Come with us. They arrested him eventually. They took him in a school, a big school, where the German army made over there their headquarters. He worked the whole day, both-- my father was very strong, strong man. He worked very hard. And thought, [INAUDIBLE] thought to himself, how will I escape from here?

So he went-- after he finished the work, he told the guard-- you know, the guard was over here watching everything what he is doing. And he told him the story-- you know, he made up a story. My father made up a story. He said to him, my wife is sick. I have five kids. I need to take her to a hospital.

He said-- he was a nice person. He said, I cannot do nothing. I'm a private. I'll take you to the officer. He said OK. My father, he went with the guard to the officer. I know he was a general or something, you know.

And he told the story, that his wife is sick, and he got five kids. I would like take them to hospital-- to take her to the hospital. So the German officer looked at him and said, how long do you need?

My father did not want to answer. He said, how about if I give you three days? Oh, yeah, thank you.

I believe-- maybe it's not quite-- that he knew that my father wants to escape. I think so. I don't know. Maybe. He said, I give you three days. So he gave a pass.

This man worked for the high command German army. Nobody can stop him. Nobody can bother him. He's on leave and so-and-so.

So next morning, he took everything, all kind of bags, so, you know, and put everything inside. And he hired a person with a horse and a buggy. He left-- he put everything over there.

And "everything" meaning your home-- your items from your home?

Everything from home, right. All the clothes, all the blankets, everything. And we went. On the way, the owner of the house and the baggy, he was not a very nice man, because we went to a forest, bandits came and beat up my father and my cousin-- so my father took his cousin, too-- and took everything what we had, you know.

And they left. But they did not touch us. They didn't-- you know. And we went. We came to the border between German and Bialystok.

So here I have a few questions. You say that the driver of the buggy was not a very nice man.

Correct.

And why do you say that?

Because the bandits were his friends.

Ah. So he told them. He told them that he has this family, and that this is a good and easy mark.

Right.

OK. And do you remember that happening?

A little bit, I do remember. Right.

What do you remember in your mind's eye of what was going on?

Well, they attacked us. And I know they did not touch us. But they beat up my father and the cousin.

And how old was the cousin? Was the cousin an adult?

Yeah.

OK. And what was his name?

Isaac.

Isaac. And his last name?

Goldberg.

Isaac Goldberg.

Right. He was related to my mother. My mother's-- my grandmother-- if I'm mistaken, his grandmother were sisters. And his mother died.

So your mother's mother, your grandmother that you didn't know, was his aunt.

Right.

OK. OK. So she did have some family.

My mother has a cousin, but not sister or brother.

OK. So you have a memory. Did you see them beat up your father?

Yes. With a bayonet, like-- I don't know, what-- bayonet. It is like a big knife, you know. And-- not sharp end, this hit on their head.

Well, that's still pretty frightening.

Well, there's a lot of times what I want through is frightening. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. And what-- do you remember whether or not your brothers and sisters, what they were doing when this was going on?

Nothing. We were small.

Yeah. Yeah.

We could not fight them, you know.

Of course not. Do you know about how many of these people there were?

No, we don't know. I don't know. A few guys.

But they did let you go.

Yes.

All right. And what about the horse and the buggy?

They continue.

So he told his friends about this. And was he the man who owned the buggy?

Right.

Was he driving it?

Yeah. Yeah.

So he continued to drive it?

Correct.

That sounds so strange.

Well, no, because we did not know that it is his-- later on we found out.

Ah. OK. So he brings you to where the--

The border.

The border. And do you remember what that looked like, that area?

No. No.

OK. All right. And then what happened?

We came to the border. And my father told the German guards what happened. They sent a patrol and caught them.

Really?

Right. And they brought everything what they took from us. And they gave it us back.

Oh, my goodness.

Right.

That's surprising on many counts.

Well, like I said, in the beginning of the war the German army, as much as what I had my experience is, as a child even, were not brutal like the SS or Gestapo, you know. So we went, came over there, like number one they sent the patrol and got them. Number two, us, the children, they put us in a barn, gave us not bread and butter but butter and bread. They put-- piece bread and a lot of butter, you know.

But the adults, they-- I don't know what they gave them, but it was OK. And then they told my family, why are you going to the Bolsheviks? Stay over here in Germany. You'll see where everything is OK. My father said no.

So they let us go.

So they let you go?

Right.

OK.

But we could not-- we get to Bialystok. We were over there, and it is like a border between Russia and Germany. The Russian army was over there already in Bialystok. And over there is a river. I have it over here the name of the river. I don't remember.

And we were over there, maybe thousands of people. They did not let us go through to Russia safe. We were-- it is like Eastern Poland.

So if I understand this correctly, this was before the war--

No, no, during the war.

I know. But before the war, this had all been Poland.

Correct.

And when the war started, when the Germans marched in, they occupied one part of Poland, where your home was.

Correct.

And Bialystok was in the other part of Poland that was occupied by the Soviets.

Right.

OK. Before you got to Bialystok, was there a Soviet border patrol, or were there Soviet officials that allowed you into the territory that they controlled?

They let us go through the border before the war, not after.

They let you go--

In that territory in Bialystok, where it used to be Poland.

Yeah.

But they did not let us go further where it's really Russia.

Ah. So you were able to stay within the former Polish territory.

Right, correct.

But not go further.

Right.

OK. And why had your father wanted to go further?

Because he didn't want to be with the-- he saw what the German is doing.

So even though they were not as brutal as later, he didn't-- he was more fearful of the Germans.

Correct.

OK. Was he fearful of the Soviets at all?

No.

OK. So there you are in Bialystok.

Correct.

Which is in Northeastern Poland.

Right.

And tell me, what do you remember seeing? You said there were-- many people there?

Was thousands of refugees over there. But they did not let them in Poland-- to Russia, until they made a pact, agreement, with Germany that, oh, they will all go to Russia, or they take them back to Poland.

Ah, to the part that Germany is controlling.

Right.

OK. So there was-- I know that before the war-- but this is a week before the war-- Molotov and Ribbentrop made a pact.

Right.

And that divided Eastern Europe.

Right, correct.

What you are talking now is a second kind of agreement, because then there are refugees, and they have to resolve, what about all these refugees? Can we cut for a second?

Cutting.

We can continue.

Speed.

OK. So this was another agreement between Germany and Russia what to do with these refugees.

Refugees, correct.

All right. So then what happened?

We got over there to that border, correct. And my father said, we're not going back to Germany, whatever it takes.

To where the Germans control Poland.

Right. Was over there a river also. We was over there place pretty long time, even in the winter. And under the blue sky.

So you had no home, no building to live in.

No, no, no. Under blue sky.

So what about the cart?

Pardon me?

What about the buggy and the horse? Did the man go back with them?

Oh, the minute we went to Russia, they-- the minute we came to the border, you know, he went back.

But you have all your things.

Correct.

How did you handle them? Did you have a new buggy, new cart?

This I don't know. But between my father and my uncle and all this, we all carry somehow, manage.

OK. But then you're sleeping out outside.

Right. And my father took a few blankets and made like a tent, you know, for the snow, and et cetera. After a while, before the German and the Russian made the agreement again what to do with them-- so was over there a river. And only two people could cross from family the river, bring water, and come back.

So what we did, my father went with my oldest sister to get water. They went over there. My sister stayed, my father came back. Then he took one child, went there, and then my sister came back. And this we go few times until he took the whole family.

At once?

No, I said one by one by one.

One at a time.

Only two people could cross the river. The patrol or the border patrol there, would not let more than two people from a family to go-- to pass, to cross.

So what he would do is he'd bring one child and leave them there.

Right.

Come back, bring the other child.

Right.

Back and forth.

Back and forth.

And so that marked the territory between what had been Poland and what was actually the Soviet Union?

Correct.

OK. Interesting. So was this Belarus, or was this Ukraine?

I don't know. Probably Belarus.

OK. We can always look on a map, but it would have been close to be Bialystok by a river, and then it's the Soviet Union.

Correct.

OK. So do you remember crossing that bridge with your father?

Yes.

OK.

Because-- and then after he moved everybody, my cousin stayed watching our belongings.

Mm-hmm, your belongings.

And when a train came to take all the refugees back to Germany, my cousin sneaked away, and he came with us. Then after everybody left, my family went-- my father and my cousin went-- and picked up all our belongings and moved it over to the Russian side.

Wow. So if I can-- I'm trying to picture what it looked like. There's this big open field. And there are lots of refugees.

Right.

And your father built a tent out of a few blankets.

Blankets. Right.

And within there, the whole family lives.

Correct.

And that's where you have all your belongings, within that two tent.

Right.

When he brings one person over and another person over, do they take a little something with them, or do they just walk over themselves with nothing?

They walk over themselves.

With nothing?

With nothing. Just like a bottle or something, like it's for water.

OK. And so all the belongings stay.



Stayed, correct.

And your cousin, or your uncle, stays to guard the belongings. And he slips away when he's supposed to go on the train.

Right.

Then he goes across the river?

Yeah.

And he meets your father?

Right.

And they both come back.

And picked everything up.

Now, was there a danger of somebody having stolen all those belongings while there was nobody watching them?

I don't know it was because everybody has his own problem. They didn't watch it, you know, to try to steal or something.

OK. OK. So in other words, when you're on the Soviet side, the whole family is there?

Correct.

The uncle is there. And your belongings are there.

Right.

Then what happened?

Then it came-- was a train over there what is going to Russia, you know. I don't know how, but my father-- my father and the uncle managed to take all our belongings, put it on the train, and we went with the train. The train-- on the way back, my uncle got stopped by, I think, a Russian patrol. And they took him to the army.

So here we're only my father, my mother, and the five, five kids.

On the train.

On the train. How my father managed to do it, because the last part what he put on the train, the train started to move.

Oh, my goodness. It was that close.

And it was freezing. So he stopped-- he got on the train, but he could not go inside. So what he did, he took some shirt or something. Somehow he managed to put it around his hand and hold it on the train. And that's how he went for hours in this cold weather.

Because if he would hold it by hand, it would froze. The hand would froze.

It would freeze on the handle.

Oh, yeah. Yes. So how-- somehow, the train after a wild stopped, for water, whatever. Then he was inside. OK. And we went on the train, I don't know how long, for weeks. We went-- we really were not in Siberia.

We were in Syktyvkar, Komi [NON-ENGLISH]. It's Ural.

Where is it?

Syktyvkar, Komi.

Komi.

Komi-- SR-- you know, Russia.

SSR.

Right. It is in Ural. Over there is a-- I told somebody where we was. He said, Siberia is summer compared to where we were. Very cold, very cold.

So you were in the Ural Mountains. You were somewhere close to the Ural Mountains in the Komi region of the SSR. Do you remember anything from that train ride?

Yes. It was-- it was huge. It was big. OK. And there were a lot of families there.

A lot of families inside?

Right.

They made their hole in the train with a blanket. So everybody needs to do-- you know.

So that was their sanitary facilities.

Correct. Because it was not a train for civilians. This is a train for cows, you know, animals, whatever is. For--

It was a cattle car.

I-- it was not really-- either it was a cattle car, or it is for moving things, you know.

Freight cars.

Freight car, correct.

OK. And did it have bunks in there? Or was everyone on the floor?

On the floor.

And there were many families?

Correct.

Now, one question that is kind of crucial. These were all people who wanted to be on the train?

Correct.

It wasn't anybody that was taken forcibly.

No, no, no.

OK. OK. How did you-- were there Soviet guards guarding the train, or soldiers with the train?

No, I don't think-- no, I didn't see any soldiers. What I remember, I don't remember any soldiers.

Did you stop often? Did the train stop in any place?

The train stopped often for-- you know, you have to fill up the train with water and coal, whatever they're using.

OK. Did it have any windows to it?

No. I don't remember any windows.

So you couldn't see on the outside.

No.

And what was-- was it a wooden kind of freight car?

Yes, yes.

OK. Do you remember, when it would stop did you look outside?

Yeah.

What did you see? Do you remember what kind of landscape it looked like?

Well, it was winter. Everything is white. Everything is white.

So this also tells me-- I'll try to place it in chronological context. You tell me if I'm right or not. The war starts September 1, 1939. And your father has all of these different experiences. He goes to Warsaw, he comes back. He's picked up by a patrol, he escapes. He goes to Bialystok, he comes back. He brings the family, yadada.

Right.

This all takes several months.

Correct.

OK. So by the time that you are in Bialystok, waiting to try to get to the Soviet side, it's winter time. So that would make it five or six months after the war starts.

At least.

Something like that, yeah?

Right.

And then when you're on that train, that takes so much longer.

Right.

So we're still within half a year of when the war starts. It's the winter of 1940.

'40.

1940, that you get to the Ural Mountains. Is that correct?

Yes.

OK. It's not like it's a year later. It's not a year and a half.

No.

It's the winter of 1940.

Correct.

OK. When you get to the Ural Mountains, what kind of-- what do you find there? What happens?

Well, they gave us like-- it's like a house, but a big house, what-- every family got its own place.

And own room or--

A kitchen-- what I remember, the kitchen was for the whole apartment. It was big--

For all the families.

All the families-- or the few, for a few families.

And was it a single home?

No.

Or was it a barracks?

Was a barrack, like a barrack. Correct.

OK. And about how many families were in one barrack?

I don't know.

You don't know.

I don't know that.

You don't know. OK. But did you have your own corner or your own room?

Each family has his own room, corner also.

Their own corner.

Right.

Do you remember blankets being hung, or do you-- was it all open?

No. Every family had like a room, you know.

A room.

Correct.

OK.

But the kitchen was for--

Everybody.

Right.

And did it have-- do you remember, was there electricity?

No electricity, no water.

No electricity, no water?

No water, no.

OK. How was the place heated?

By wood.

By wood?

Was it cold in those-- in that barracks?

Well, when it is 40 or 50 below 0, I imagine it's a bit cool.

[LAUGHTER]

A little bit. And did you still have all of your belongings with you?

Yes.

And so you had your own blankets?

yes

Pillows?

Yes.

OK. I ask because that makes a difference.

Of course.

If some people don't have it--

Then you freeze.

--they're in tough shape.

You freeze.

Yeah, you freeze.

Correct.

And what other kinds of belongings had you managed to bring from Zgierz to the Urals?

I really don't know. But we had our blanket-- it was not blankets that you use over here. But they were like this from-- what do you call it? From-- not chicken, but--

Goose feathers.

Right.

So there was down blankets. Those are warm.

Yes, very warm.

OK. And did you have your own pots and pans to cook on?

Honestly, I don't know. But I think so, yes. We took it with us.

OK. In the journey-- which doesn't sound like it was an easy journey-- did anybody get sick?

What I know, what I remember, no.

No, OK. All right. So you're in the barracks. They're shared by many families. Was this in a town? Or was this in the middle of nowhere?

Well, it was in a town. Was over there factories and et cetera.

Do you know the name of the town?

It is in Komi-- no, I don't.

You don't. You don't. Did you stay there for a long time?

Yes.

Did you stay there for years?

Yes.

OK. So did you ever move from there?

No.

OK. So you were in this place for the length of the war.

We were there for about four years.

Four years.

Because when Russia invaded Poland, they let all the Polish citizen move out from over there to go to Russia. To Russia, you know, we were like 300 kilometers from Moskva. What it calls the place where we were was Kursk.

Kursk. OK. And Kursk was the name of the region or the--

Correct.

All right. But you don't know the town in Kursk?

No.

OK.

By the way, Kursk is-- what I know, what I read not too long ago, a few years ago-- is a big-- today, I think it's a big Russian navy over there, Kursk.

So was it all--

What I know what something was with the big ships come to Kursk.

So it was fairly far north.

Right.

Aha. So was it on the Arctic Ocean?

No.

Was it near a river?

I guess so, yes. I don't know. This, I don't-- you know.

OK, that's all right.

I don't know.

All right. Let's go back. You arrive. This is your new home.

Correct.

What happens then? How does life go on?

OK. Was over there a big factory of shoes, making shoes. OK. So my father worked over there. And then he was in charge of the ready of the shoes are finished and all the material.

My mother was working in a laundry. OK. This was winter. And she had to every time to take out a blanket or something. You do not cook over there. You do not boil the clothes. Because you take out the clothes or the sheets, you know, you hang up outside. After 10, 20 minutes, it's like a piece of ice, it's so cold.

And my mother got sick.

From doing this work.

Right.

Because it was wet and--

So cold, frozen, you had from the laundry. She went to hospital in December-- I think she had like tuberculosis, I think so.

OK.

And I had-- the second sister, the number two sister--

Linda.

Linda. She was sick, too.

OK.

After a while, my sister died.

Linda died.

Right.

And my mother was the same time in the hospital. And she felt better. And she came home. A neighbor came in and said to my mother, I'm sorry to hear about your daughter. This was the end of my mother.

She didn't know that Linda had died.

Correct. She was in the hospital. We took her right away to the hospital, and that's it, she couldn't take anymore. And there my mother died.

Were you there at the hospital?

No. I was, I think, that time in school.

Did you see that neighbor come in and say-- and talk to your mother or not?

No, I don't remember.

So this was something that your father told you later? Or the other brothers--

No, I know that-- you know, when she died, we knew.

No, no, no. I'm talking about how she found out about your sister. You were not there when--

No, I was not there. Yeah, my father told me, you know, the neighbor came, so and so and so.

What a loss. What a loss. And was there a funeral?

Well, there you don't-- you know, it was not a funeral. They take, you know, and they bury.

You were still very little.



Correct.

Did you go to any of that or not?

No. My father would not take me.

OK. So that's two people out of the family.

Right. In time of three, four weeks.

Was this in the winter of 1941?

I don't know, but I would think so, yes.

So it's not when you first arrived.

No, no.

It's a year later.

No, no. No.

Did you learn Russian quickly?

No. But we all spoke later on Russian.

OK. During that first year, did your parents talk much about these new circumstances, and the conditions in the factory, and the conditions in the house and town and food, and things like that? Did they talk about this new environment that they were in?

No. No.

OK. Were they happy to be there?

Well, in a way yes, because they knew-- they heard what is going on in Germany. So we'd better work in Russia, where we are.

OK. And how did local people and the local officials treat them? Treat all of you?

The officials were OK. But the children, the boys, you know, was not very nice. Also--

The children in-- the local children in--

Right, right, right.

OK. In what way were they not very nice?

Calling names, beating, fighting, you know.

Were they antisemitic?

Yes.

OK. Were most of the other families that were on that train going from Bialystok to Russia, where they almost all

Jewish? Or were there some non-Jewish?

No, no. It was also Poles.

There were also Poles. And did the Poles-- were they settled in this area as well, in that barracks that you lived in?

Yes. It was a big town. It was a big town.

OK.

It was factories and et cetera. It was not, you know, somewhere nowhere in the Sahara, you know.

OK. OK. And how were relations with your non-Jewish, Polish neighbors, or Poles who were with you?

OK.

It was normal?

All right. No, right.

OK. So if it was young boys who were name calling, they would have been young Russian boys or whoever?

No. Russian, the Polish, you know.

Doesn't matter.

Correct.

OK. When did you start school?

Well, over there, until when you start school, when the weather is below like 50 degrees, the school-- you're not going to school.

OK. There is no school.

There's no school. Number one. Number two, the snow is higher than the building. And, you know, you go a day in school, and then two, three days you're not going, you know. And after my mother died, OK-- no, this is way after.

But as long my mother was alive, we stayed all together. We went in school. And then-- and my father and my sister were working in the same factory.

Gila? Your oldest sister.

My older-- Henye.

Henye, excuse me. Henye. Gila is-- your mom was Gila

My mother was Gila.

Yeah.

She was a bookkeeper over there. And she was only-- and over then in Russia, where we were living, you go to school until age 12. By age 12 you're going to work. My sister was a good student, especially in math. And she was working in the factory as a bookkeeper.

That's a fairly good job.

Yeah. My father was working over there and he was in charge of the product.

He was in charge of the final quality control?

Right, correct. And one day, he went to the market with her, and he saw shoes from the factory where he's working.

And what does that mean when he saw shoes from the factory at the marketplace.

That somebody is stealing. Now, in Russia or in Siberia, you have three kinds of citizens-- one who is in jail, one who is going to jail, and one who used to be in jail.

So one who's in jail, one who's going, and one who used to be.

Yeah. Because if you want to make a living, what you get-- used to get from the government, let's say, half a pound or quarter pound of bread for the whole day long, you know. The soup what we ate, take little bit no water. You go out, take a pat of snow, you melt it, you put a few piece of bread. This was your soup.

So because of my father was in charge of the product, he went to the black market and saw the shoes. So he called the police officer and said, they arrested him. And then there is the manager of the factory came out and said my father, he is a hero, he found it.

And there are two ladies. A woman get to him and cursed him out and said, you're going to jail. Because the old lady who sold the shoes was her mother. And this woman was a member of the Komsomolskaya, the Russian party.

So the woman who cursed out your father was a member of the Komsomol.

Right. And the lady was her mother. They NKVD, the police, came to our house and searched everything. They found nothing.

So the NKVD is the secret police.

Right.

OK.

They found nothing. But anyway, because that woman said and my father that bah! they arrested him. When they arrested him-- so we were kids, and my sister was still working, and we the three brothers, we went to-- my father sent us to an [NON-ENGLISH], you know, where children without parents--

An orphanage. You want to an orphanage.

Correct, correct. It's a Polish one. OK. We over there stayed until-- until Russia invaded Poland.

So you were in the orphanage for two or three years?

Pardon me?

Were you in the orphanage for two or three years?

Right, correct, correct.

And did your father, was he continued to be arrested, or was he released?

Right. No, he was not released.

So he was--

He was only released when we could go back to Russia.

You mean to Poland?

No. To Russia. To Kursk, when after-- excuse me-- after Russia invaded Poland, they let all the Polish citizens go to inside Russia, where-- to Kursk, where I said before. So then they released my father, and then we all went to Kursk.

But for-- now, when this incident happened, that he saw shoes from the factory--

[PHONE RINGS]

Let's cut for a minute.

Cutting.

OK. When--

OK. We were interrupted a little bit. But now I was asking a few questions.

Go ahead.

When your father had gone to the marketplace and found this person--

Shoes, right.

--the shoes from there, do you know about when that was? Was that in 1941?

No, way later.

Was it in '42?

Probably '42 or-- '42, '43, something like this.

So it's well after-- it's like a year or almost two years after your mother dies.

Right.

So for those two years, you're still together as a family.

Right.

OK. And then he is arrested. He's kept in prison. And you were sent to an orphanage.

We all three.

The three of you.

All three brothers.

So the three brothers, but your sister no.

No, because she was working.

Does she stay in the same barracks that you were in before?

Correct, right.

So instead of having her whole family there--

Yeah, she was by herself.

She was by herself.

Correct.

OK. Until that time, you mentioned this a little bit-- let's talk about food. Was it easy to get food? And what kind of food was there?

Whatever you could put the hand on. If I have found, for instance, a rotten potato in the ground, I would eat it. Not cooked.

Really? So you were hungry?

I don't remember when I was-- [LAUGHS] --not hungry. Whenever-- I don't remember when I went to sleep with a full stomach.

From the time you got there?

Yes.

Wow.

We were always hungry. We never had enough food.

OK. And were you given food or did you have to buy food?

Some of them you get from the government. Some of them you buy it on the market.

And by the "market," do you mean like the black market?

Yes. What farmers used to bring to market, right. I don't know if it's black market or market, because, you know, some farmers used to bring their food what the crops, you know, and they sell it.

And that was allowed?

Yeah.

That was allowed.

Correct.

But selling production made in a state factory was not allowed.

Well, this means you sold it. [LAUGHS]

Yeah. Yeah. I want to still talk about how people fed themselves and how your family fed itself. Did you-- and what kind of food? Did you-- you said a person who worked got 1/2 pound of bread a day.

No. A person who's working, he get one hot meal in the factory.

OK. And--

But the rest of the family, everybody gets-- I don't know, 1/2 pound or 1/4 pound of bread a day.

Yeah. So in other words, there was a certain limit that you would-- you were able to either buy or were getting. Which was it?

I think we were getting from the-- from the government.

OK. And did you then-- if that was not enough, how did you get other food?

Well, you worked in this factory, you get some pay for it. So with this money, you can buy anything what you need for food [INAUDIBLE].

So it was-- for a while, it was your father, your mother, and your oldest sister who were working and earning money.

Right.

Was Linda also working, or did she simply get sick?

She-- no, she was not working.

So she was not bringing in money.

No. And the fact she died very soon, you know.

Yeah. When your mother passed away, that leaves two people who are earning a salary.

Correct.

What kind of food could they buy with the salary that they got? What was available?

In the market, everything is available. But no food, I don't know. But anything-- you know, everything is available. But I would like to mention something else. When we came to Kursk-- excuse me. When we came to Syktyvkar, Komi--

Syktyvkar?

Yeah.

Is that the name of the town?

No. Komi is the name of the town. Syktyvkar is the area, the whole area. OK?

OK. So Syktyvkar is the area.

Right. A lot of our friends from our town were very upset with my father, mad at my father.

Why?

Because they-- my father, in a way, was their leader. And when they were over there, they did not really know what's going on, really, in Poland. And they're cold, and the hunger, and some people died. They were upset with my father, because he convinced them to go to Russia. But after the war, they were very happy.

So it was not easy for your father during this time.

Right.

Now, I want to ask, did your father have any political views? Did he-- was he a political person at all?

He was a Zionist.

He was a Zionist.

Right. But has nothing to do, you know--

OK. Did he ever-- when he was put in charge of the shoes, the production, that's a responsible position.

Correct, very responsible.

Only trusted people would be put in charge of such things.

Right.

Did he join the party?

No.

No. Did he have any views on the system, the Communist Party beliefs, ideology?

Well, no. But in Russia that time, the teachers used us kids, the children. Did you hear anything your parents are talking? Do you hear their views, et cetera, et cetera. And if-- and over there was expression-- if you are asked something, you have one answer-- I don't know.

Because if in school the teacher asked you, where were your parents last night? And you say, let's say, they went to friends. And they check it, and he wasn't over there by his friends, watch it. In trouble.

You or your parents?

Whatever we asked, I don't know.

How soon did you learn that, that you didn't know?

Pretty soon.

(LAUGHING) Yeah.

Pretty soon.

OK. Did your father also have this kind of caution? Was he also careful about what he said, whom he said it to?

I guess so. Everybody has to be over there very careful.

So did he talk much to you about what his day was like, what his--

No, no, no, no. He even didn't have time, because they were working long hours.

OK. So he was not somebody who really believed in the system?

No.

OK. But had nevertheless voluntarily gone there. And because he had convinced other people to go, and they experienced this kind of--

Right, life.

--life and circumstances, they were not happy.

Correct.

In general, and with him in particular.

Right.

Did you have a radio in your barracks?

What is the radio?

OK.

At that time.

OK. Where did you-- the reason why I ask is, did you get news from some source of what's going on in the world, what's going on in the war?

The news what we used to get is only from Pravda, from the paper.

And what is Pravda, for those--

Newspaper.

OK. What kind of newspaper? A Russian newspaper, from the Russian government.

OK. And did you read Pravda as a child?

No.

Who in your family would read it?

My sister, my father. No, we didn't. We were-- you know.

And that was it. That was the only news you got.

Right, correct. But we did not discuss it. I don't remember ever we discussed what's going on about the war. We had other problems.



OK. Then what were some of those problems?

Pardon me?

What were those problems?

What were the problems? Food, freezing, you know, conditions of life.

Yeah. Trying to survive.

That's right.

Because also-- I didn't mention before, my father saved quite a few people, their life, when we run away from Poland.

How did he do this? And what were the circumstances?

Well, like I said before, that he convinced them to go with him. If not, they would go back to get to Lodz or somewhere else. You know what happened over there.

Later. You find out later.

Correct.

What about your uncle Itzhak Goldberg?

He was in the war. He got wounded in this arm. After the war, we found out that he's alive. But it's along the story later, because when we were in Germany-- when I say "we," not my father. Just we three brothers, he got in contact with us.

Aha. So during the war there was no contact.

Uh-uh. No, not at all.

You didn't know. OK. Were you at home when your father was arrested?

Yes.

What was that like? I mean, tell me about what happened in specific.

Well, like I said before, at 12 o'clock the NKVD, the police came to our house. And they searched everything. Now, a small incident was that my father after World War I-- I think he fought with the Polish army against Russia.

Oh, that's not good.

And he had a picture of it. And he got also a picture, he was a member of the Zionist party Betar.

The Zionist party Betar.

Betar. Betar is, I know Jabotinsky. Maybe you heard about him.

Tell us who he is. I've heard, but tell us who was Jabotinsky.

Jabotinsky was a right-wing leader. He started with the Betar movement, what is a Zionist organization. Later on they formed the British in Israel, OK? And my father was in Poland a member of Betar. OK.

As far for the Russians, he was-- Betar they didn't like.

So he was he a Bourgeois nationalist? In Soviet terms, he was somebody who was--

Correct. Correct.

OK.

And here the picture with the uniform. One of the guys from the NKVD who searched-- and the other one was two guys, another one had all the papers and all the pictures. And he found a picture. He looked on the other-- left, right and see nobody, throw it right in the fire. Because if they would found it, pow.

Really?

Right. Fighting against the Russian army, to be a Betar Zionist, either way death penalty.

So he lived your father's life.

Pardon me?

He saved your father's life.

Correct. Correct.

Why do you think he did that?

Pardon me?

Why do you think he did that?

I don't know. Maybe he-- he himself did not like what is going on. Maybe he was Polish. Maybe he was Jewish. We don't know. But he saved my father's life. Because he would-- if he would save this picture, you bet--

Yeah. That's immediately-- when you said he was in the Polish army against Russia, it is--

Correct. Correct.

So you see your father taken away.

Yes.

And you see-- then you are left with your three brothers-- and your two brothers.

Two brothers.

And your older sister.

Right.

How are they behaving? Because you are the youngest. You're the baby of the family

It is what it is. You don't have any choice, you know. we were a very united family, and we had one another.

So what happens after that? Do they leave you there with all the children for a while and then they take you to the orphanage? Or do they take you right away?

It's not what they take. I remember I saw my father, at least for three months, every day going from the jail to the factory.

So he's still working in the factory.

No. He had to give over all the-- all the things, you know.

That he was doing.

What he was doing.

OK. OK. So you still were able to see him?

Right, for-- right. And then we went-- I don't know if they took us or voluntarily went to the office.

Orphanage.

Orphanage, correct.

OK. Now, describe for me a little bit about this orphanage. What did it look like? How many children were there? And we'll go from there.

A bunch.

A bunch of children.

Right.

Would you say a hundred?

I would say a lot more than a hundred.

Two?

But I cannot-- I don't know, you know.

OK. Were most of them real orphans?

I don't know. Some of them, that the parents were-- could not support them. Some of them, that the parents, like I said, in jail. Some of them, parents died, you know. All kind, all kind. It was a Polish, not a Russian.

It was a Polish orphanage.

Right.

And it was allowed to operate as a Polish orphanage then.

Yes.

Would that have made-- did that make a difference between being a Polish orphanage and a Russian orphanage?

No, I don't think so.

OK. How was the food in that orphanage?

At least they gave us pretty good-- I mean, satisfactory food. You can survive.

OK. So it wasn't like you were so hungry that you would eat a rotten potato.

No. No.

OK. And how did the people who run the orphanage treat you?

As much I remember, not bad. The kids, you know, the children, other children called names, but it's OK.

So it was still the children would call you names for being Jewish.

Right, right.

OK. But were there any people who you remember being particularly kind to you, or taking care of you?

Not really. Everybody was-- you know, everybody had his own problems. Even the teachers who is in charge over there, they had their own problems.

OK. Were there many Jewish children in that orphanage?

Was quite a few.

Did you kind of stick together?

I know I stick together with my two brothers.

OK. And did you-- did the three of you share a same room, or were you always sleeping in the same area, or how as it--

It was a big barrack and was a lot of beds. And every morning, they pray [NON-ENGLISH], you know.

So it was a Catholic orphanage.

Right.

Or at the very least, they were allowed to pray in that orphanage.

Right, correct.

See, all of this is very interesting for me, because the Soviet Union, having an ideology of atheism, the fact that they even let the Poles have their own orphanage, and that they're allowed to pray-- whereas when you went to Russian school, what they're doing is they're-- or Soviet school, they're asking you, what did your parents say, it sounds like a real difference.

Well, I don't know why or what is, but this what I remember.

OK. Was there anybody Jewish who was teaching you Hebrew prayers?

No.

No, OK. And did you start-- did you go to school at that orphanage? Did they have their own school there?

No, no.

So no, they didn't have the school, or no you didn't go to school.

No, was no schools.

There was no school.

I don't remember should be over there a school.

How did you spend your day?

Playing around with other kids who were nice, and some work we used to do. That's all. I don't remember going over there in school.

OK. And your father was in a local prison?

Correct, yeah.

Were you able to visit him?

No.

And your older brothers also couldn't visit him.

No.

Did your sister visit you at the orphanage?

Once in a blue moon. Because, you know, she had to work all the time. Even on Sundays, you know, and Saturday-- seven days a week.

OK. And was the orphanage in the same town?

Yes.

OK. So did you know, or was it the fact, that your father was imprisoned close by?

Yes.

And your sister is close by. But you don't see her much.

Correct.

All right. Were you able-- were you allowed out of the orphanage to go around town if you wished to?

No.

OK. And your brothers, the same?

Yeah, no.

So in some ways it's a bit like a prison, but not really.

Well, you're right.

OK Which had you preferred, being in the barracks or being in the orphanage? If you had a choice.

Depends. If with my father and my sister, I would like to be in the barracks. If not, then [INAUDIBLE]. Because who would take care of us? My sister was working from early morning until late night. And, you know, who would cook for us? Who would prepare food and et cetera?

My oldest sister, she was like our mother.

She had a lot on her shoulders.

Pardon me?

She had a lot on her shoulders.

Correct.

At a young age.

That's right. And now my sister, even when we went back to Poland, and then when we were in Israel, she was like our mother. She was cooking and doing the laundry and everything.

Mm-hmm. So this went on for two years or so that you were in the orphanage?

Yes. Because, like I said, when the war-- when Russia invaded Poland, we were allowed to go to Kursk-- Kursk embassy. there is the place. And then we got reunited.

With your father.

Correct.

What did he look like after having been in prison for such a while?

No-- He was working over there, too. It was not-- it's not prison that you all the time beaten up or, you know-- he was working over there, what everybody was.

So was it like a labor camp?

Yes.

OK. And you see, another thing that is interesting here is that in 1941, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Sikorski from the government in exile in London makes an agreement with Stalin to release Poles, ethnic Poles and Polish citizens, from the gulag. And there's an army of General Anders.

I remember.

Yeah. In that orphanage, had there have been children whose parents were in that army, or whose fathers were in that army?

I don't know.

OK.

I don't know.

And that was very early on, because Germany attacked the Soviet Union.

Correct.

So what you're talking about sounds to be like a second kind of policy. Because for three years already, from '41, '42, '43, Poles are leaving where they had been either deported or where they ended up, and they're trying to get out of the Soviet Union. Did you know of any of this when you were in your orphanage, or when you were still in the barracks?

No. No. Only what I know, after the war-- after the war ended, all the Polish citizens could go back to Poland.

That's what you knew.

Right. And in '44 or so, when Russia invaded Poland, then the Polish citizens-- I know we were allowed to leave our place in Russia to go in-- in Russia, to live in Russia.

OK. So you were allowed to leave Komi. And-- was it Sivitar, you said?

Syktyvkar.

Syktyvkar. You were allowed to leave there and go into the Russian Federation.

Right, correct.

That Republic. That's interesting, that there was this sort of two-step kind of situation.

And then in '46, we went to Poland.

All right. So you meet in Kursk with your father.

No, we met together in Syktyvkar, Komi, and we went all together to Kursk.

And when you get to Kursk, what kind of living situation do you have?

We got a barrack. I think we were two families. My father was working, my sister was working. And we went to-- over there in school.

So that was the second school. The first one had been before the orphanage, and now this is the second time you're in school.

Correct. OK.

Let's cut a little.

Cutting--

I'm--

OK. got speed.

Ready.

And what was school like here when you were in Kursk? Was it much different than the school you first started going to?

I don't think so.

Do you have any memories of it?

No, not too much. I know they teach us about the Communist Party and et cetera. But nothing especially.

OK. Now, the fact that your father had been in prison, did he have any special restrictions on him?

No.

No. None. So now he was truly a free person.

Right, correct.

There's another point I want to ask about that you may not have known about or maybe knew about later, going back to Bialystok and then into the Soviet Union. There were many people, Jews who had escaped the German occupied part of Poland and ended up in the Russian occupied part of Poland.

And their experience is that they are brought to the NKVD, and they are asked, do you want to be a citizen of Poland, do you want to go back, or do you want to be a citizen of the Soviet Union? And when they say, we want to be a citizen of Poland, because they would have left their families back there, they are then taken and involuntarily deported to Siberia.

My question to you is, do you think your father was asked the same question?

Honestly, I don't know. But what my father said, most of the people there were not asked any questions. Every day back, they took them back to this. That's why we escaped to the Russian side. That's what I remember.

OK. OK. No, but it was-- you know, they were told-- you see, the people that I've interviewed who have had that experience were told once that they said, we want to go back to Poland, that, OK, we'll bring you back. But then they're put on the trains, and they realize very quickly they're going east not west. And then their story, you know, has its own--

I didn't know.

You don't know of those things.

Yeah, I didn't know.

Did you ever meet, either in Syktyvkar--

Syktyvkar.

--or in Kursk, any Jews who had been released from the gulag? Had you met anybody who had been deported to Siberia and then was let go?

Yeah, we had a few friends. I know of a few people, right.

OK. But did you meet them there or later on in life?

No, in Kursk.



In Kursk.

Right.

And did they tell you much about what their experience had been?

I think we all were-- we had the same experience.

OK. And what was that experience then?

The same thing what I had, what we had.

That is you're hungry.

Yes. Freezing.

You're hungry, you're freezing, and you don't talk much.

That's right.

OK. How long did you stay in Kursk?

For about, I think, for about two years.

And so when you're in Kursk, that's when the war ends.

Right.

Do you remember where you were when you learned that the war is over?

Yes.

Tell me about it.

They made a big parade with Germans, with Germans captured prisoners. They walked them to death, OK. I remember they made after the parade-- and by the way, my sister, let her rest in peace, she was speaking in front of everybody how great the Soviet Union is. She was a good student.

And you saw thousands of German soldiers, you know, kept moving them to, I think to Siberia, whatever it is, to work over there, to working camps.

That's what you remember from it.

Right. And it was a big-- you know, a big, big, big deal. And everybody was happy, you know.

How is it that your sister came to make this speech, this public speech?

Because she was chosen from-- I think my sister was in the party. I don't know. I don't remember [INAUDIBLE]. But she was chosen to have a speech on a platform.

Well, she by that point, in 1945, she's no longer a teenager. She's 19 years old. She's a young lady. She can make up her own mind about things.

Right.

Did she believe? Was she somebody who believed in the ideals of the Soviet Union?

I don't know. We never spoke about it. But privately we never spoke. But to be with other people, you have to play the right game, you know.

OK. OK. Did you know, with your father and your brothers, though, what they really felt? Did you know what the real feelings were as opposed to what you had to play?

They were not communist-- believe in the communist-- you know.

I mean, one reason why I ask this is not so much to probe so much about your family the way I'm doing that. It is to allow people in the future who will hear your interview to have some understanding of how a system, a political system, affects the way people behave in private life, and to what limits they feel free and to what limits they don't feel free.

And that's one of the reasons I'm asking this.

Well, you're not allowed, at that time in Russia, to express your real feeling if you want to be alive.

OK. Well, that's simply put. OK. So at that point, when the war ends, do you have any idea of what has gone on in Europe with all the Jews who remained under German control?

Not really. No really. Never-- no. Not really.

When do you first find out about it?

Well, when the war ended, and we were-- in '46 we went back to Poland, OK? And there we, because my father and my sister, they worked, and we were three brothers, we went-- or my father arranged-- to a Jewish organization in Poland. We were in Walbrzych, what is Poland.

And we went over there. It's like a kibbutz, if you know what is a kibbutz.

OK. So yeah, it was like a kibbutz type of place?

It is a Jewish organization where they took children with parents or without parents, but just the children, not the parents. And we went on that organization. And after a few weeks, we went to Germany after the war.

And over there we start really to get an education. But the education was, you did not have classes. It is classes according more likely your knowledge, your ability, OK? And we start-- we learned of the eventually Hebrew and other things, math and everything, as much.

And we were in Germany for about eight months.

Was your father there, too?

No. My father and my sister stayed in Poland.

In what place were they staying in Poland? What was the name--

Walbrzych.

Walbrzych.

Right.

You had mentioned that, I just didn't hear it before.

Right, Walbrzych.

And how far-- where is Walbrzych?

I cannot describe you, but it is also a big town in Poland.

Was is close to Zgierz?

No, no, no.

Did anybody go back to Zgierz?

I think my father went back, just to for visit. But nobody went back, you know. I have people from my town from Zgierz, what they went to see over there. They're living over here in the state, New York. They went to visit with the kids.

I never went back. Over there, like you said, then over there we are start to hear what is happening.

So when you are in Germany, when you are going to school, then you start to--

It's a Jewish organization.

Jewish organization, yeah. That's when you start to hear what had started to happen, what had happened during the war.

Right, right. Because later on, what my father told me, all his friends who went with him to Russia, what got upset with him, then they thank him for this, because they saw what happened to the rest of the people, you know.

Yeah. Yeah.

When we were-- I'm going a little bit back.

That's OK.

When we went to Kursk-- I don't know how, but we got before Passover-- one time or twice, I don't remember-- packages from UNRRA. And with [NON-ENGLISH], and my father distribute this to the rest of the families. He was in a way their leader over there. Also in Russia, when we were in Syktyvkar.

Syktyvkar, yeah.

We were in Germany for about eight months. We went then-- we went over there then to France.

Do you remember what place in Germany you were in?

Yeah.

What was it called? Zeilsheim.

Zeilsheim.

Right. And Ulm-Dornstadt.

Domstadt?

Right.

Ulm and--

In Dornstadt.

OK.

OK? And we went to-- the whole organization--

And then you went to France.

Right. Exactly. I was in Zeilsheim, Germany and Ulm. It's Dornstadt. Ulm is a small town. Dornstadt is a main--  
City.

Correct.

If it's the same one that I'm thinking of, it's in North Rhine-Westphalia, which is near Essen and Duisburg and--

I think so. I don't know.

OK, all right. We went to France. And we over there for about 12 months-- 14 months.

And your father and your sister are still in--

Still in [NON-ENGLISH] right. We again, we're starting like in Germany, the same thing, the same organization. What was nice, a lot of women from Hadassah-- I don't know if you heard-- you know what this is.

Well, tell us, for those who will know, tell us what is Hadassah.

A Jewish women organization to help other people.

OK. It's a charity organization.

Pardon me?

A charity organization.

Correct. We loved it, because they brought us chocolate and all kinds of things. They were so nice to us. You know, we were never-- we never saw something like a piece of chocolate. We did not know what this "chocolate" means. Something like my grandkids said, dad, you did not have an iPhone in Siberia? You know.

You didn't?

[LAUGHTER]

You know, they cannot understand, my grandkids don't understand, the way I was brought up. Yeah, you know. I really did not have a childhood. So over there was really nice. We were really treated nice, because the UNRRA helped us, you know. And the Hadassah women used to come and give us all their love.

[PHONE RINGS]

[GROANS]

OK.

Now, what, you know.

Speed.

Because this is only until we went to Bialystok and not after. This I told you already before, so, you know.

Ah, yes. This is about your father's interview you were mentioning. Now, you're in France. You find out what is chocolate. Hadassah comes and gives you nice things and is kind to the children, then.

Very nice, very kind, you know.

And what is the purpose? Is the purpose of this entire setup so that you would go to Israel eventually?

Yes. Because, you know-- because we could not go to Israel until '48, because the British would not let us. If not, we would go straight to Israel.

OK. So you're in a camp in France.

Right.

OK. Where? Where? Where would this be?

Is a town [NON-ENGLISH]. I don't know if it is really. But it's not far from Paris, I know.

So this is in 1947? '48?

'47 and '48, because in '48 we came to Israel.

So when was the first time you stopped feeling hungry?

When I was in that organization, the Jewish organization in Poland.

That's the first time.

Right. Then over there they fed us good.

OK. Because I was just thinking right now, in 1947 and '48, you are outside of Paris in a camp, but in France, which is known for plentiful, good food.

Oh, yeah. Even in Germany, too. You know, because, if I'm not mistaken, the UNRRA, United States Relief-- you know--

United Nations, yeah.

United Nations used to supply us with all the food and et cetera.

I see. OK.

If I'm not mistaken.

Now, when does-- who hears from your uncle Itzhak? Who hears-- who is the first one who receives word from him, that he was in the Soviet army and that he had been wounded?

I think we were sending letters to Poland, you know. And I think somehow my father and my sister found out about him. He was living in Germany, too.

So he had made it from the Soviet Union to Germany?

Correct.

Being a former Soviet soldier.

Correct.

That's a story.

Right.

Because not every Soviet soldier ended up in Germany.

Well, he is a Polish citizen, and he went back to Poland.

Mm-hmm. Ah, as a Polish citizen he was able to do so.

Right.

Of course.

And from there he went to Germany.

Now, why did your father and your sister stay in Poland?

Because they did not have a choice. You know, where would they go? Over there, they-- my father was working wherever it-- And they speak the language and et cetera. So my sister, too.

When you were growing up with the whole family before all these things happened, what language did you speak at home?

[NON-ENGLISH]. Yiddish.

OK. Did anybody know Polish from the children?

Yeah.

You all knew Polish?

I knew a little bit. But because I was in Russia, I forgot completely. But I still speak Russian a bit.

So you understand, you still have maintained Russian.

Right, Russian. I do speak it.

But you still-- you have a lot of languages. You have Yiddish, Russian, Hebrew, English. At least four. Any more to

that?

Well, I used to speak a little bit German, too.

That makes sense.

But not right now. You know, a language, if you do not use it, you lose it.

This is true. This is true.

You know. I spoke perfect Russian, and now I have to think what I'm going to say in Russian.

Mm-hmm. OK, let's go back to France.

We were in France until '48.

How did you leave France?

OK. My two brothers were supposed to go with the Exodus ship to Israel. And now, by writing back and forth with my father, he asked us, please do not separate. Be all time all three together. So when they want to take my two older brothers on the Exodus, they did not want to take me.

You were too young.

Because I was a minor. Why they needed over there my two brothers, they are older, they can hold a weapon, you know, some gun. And in 1948-- if I'm not mistaken, this was in September-- we all went to Israel after Israel became a state.

OK. By boat.

Of course. It was in beautiful boat. I think it was-- [LAUGHS] it was a boat for merchandise. You had bunks from wood, you know. You go, you know, like you see in the movie, like in the ghettos, you know.

Those kinds of bunks.

That's right. But we came to Israel.

And what was that like? That's certainly far different from the snow being higher than a house.

Right. OK, in Israel, my two brothers were older, they went to a kibbutz in [NON-ENGLISH], OK? It is north, northern border-- the northern border with Lebanon. And I went to a [NON-ENGLISH] also orphans, you know, for children without parents, what is near Haifa, Kiryat Bialik. It was on the name-- I don't know if you ever heard, Henrietta Szold.

No.

She was a Jewish woman what she organized for children. I don't know if she was alive at the time, but it's on her, this.

Henrietta--

Henrietta Szold.

Henrietta Szold.

Szold, correct. I was over there until '51, when my father and my sister came to Israel.

And how were they able to come to Israel?

United. Reunited with family. Because we were in Israel, so they let them out.

And what about your uncle?

He came-- he got married in Germany with a lady what-- I don't know if she was married before and her family got assassinated, you know, that-- or I don't know. He met her there. They met and they came to Israel [INAUDIBLE].

OK. So he marries in Germany and then comes with his new wife to Israel.

Well, when Israel was already established and everybody could come to Israel.

Of course. Of course.

You know. If you're not Soviet Union, then you can come to Israel. Like my father, Soviet Union or Poland either way, they did not. But was a time when Poland government let Jews out of Poland if they had family in Israel.

OK. And the interesting thing, and maybe the good news, is that he had been a member of Betar, and he had wanted to come to Israel--

My father always wanted to come to Israel, but-- plus, the children are in Israel.

Yeah. So in 1951, is that when you'd say the family is reunited?

Correct.

In 1951, you're 15 years old.

Right.

Do you go live with your father and your sister?

Yes, of course.

And your brothers, what do they do?

Also.

Also. So really, you all start living together?

Right. My older brother, I think in '52, went to the army. Or maybe earlier, a little bit. I went in the army in '54.

You were then 18 years old.

Yes.

And how long did you serve in the army?

What everybody at that time-- two and a half years. It is not-- you cannot go out whenever you wanted.

OK. So it was-- so I didn't know how long the service was.

At that time it was two and a half years. Today it's three years. And in Israel, women and girls and boys, go into same



thing. But the girls go in for less.

As you're talking to me, the impression I have is that a great deal of your childhood is spent in different orphanages.

Correct.

Did you feel a kind of a loss because you were in those orphanages?

No.

No?

No.

And why not? I mean, not like you should. But many children, when you're not within your family circle, and you're in an orphanage--

Well, I don't want to say we are special family, but we always were united, you know. We always took care of one another. People in my situation, or you lost, or you are-- how you say [NON-ENGLISH]-- nothing bothers you, no way.

And you are in which category?

You have to choose. You have to judge this. You have to judge this.

Well, I can have my impression, but you're the one who lived through it. So my question really is to you-- was it the first or the second? For yourself.

What do you mean?

Well, you said either you're lost, or nothing bothers you.

Nothing bothers me. I lost all my family. I lost my wife. And I'm still here. And I'm always busy. I did not have an easy life.

No. Even the part that you've told me about is not easy.

Even now. Even after the army, and after I came to the States. When I came to the States, I was working between 90 and 100 hours a week.

Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness.

To make a living, to give my kids education. And if I had to do it again, I'd do it again, the same thing. Because I have a good family. I have-- I don't want to say I have good children. I have excellent children.

I'm sure it means a lot.

They're looking after me. They take care of me, if I need it. Thank God I don't need, but, you know. Like my kids, almost every day call me. I'm proud of my children. This is my happiness.

That's a big one. That's a big one. Did they-- were you a storyteller as they were growing up? Did you tell them what your early life was like?

Here and there, not especially.

Not really, huh?

Not really. Your late wife, was she a survivor as well?

No, she born in Israel.

She was born--

She was spoiled.

[LAUGHTER]

She was spoiled. No.

Well, she was spared as well. She was spared some of the things you went through.

Of course. Of course.

And did your grandchildren express an interest in--

Yes. They always ask me. Dad, tell us your story. And they always ask me I should write what my story is for the future generations.

Well, that's exactly where we want to talk to you.

I know. I know, I know.

Because many of the different parts of what you're telling can only make sense if somebody knows the context.

Correct. Yes.

What was the context in Zgierz? What was it-- what did it mean that there was a part occupied by Russian, a part occupied by Germany, or more accurately the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany? What was it like to live in the Soviet Union? What were the circumstances? What is-- how do you survive? What does it mean when you your soup is made out of bits of bread and melted snow? You know. How does that happen?

All of that is-- you know, you were in so many different worlds-- you know, one world, another, a third, a fourth. It takes a lot to be able to adjust to each of them.

You don't have a lot of choices. Or you make it or you break it.

Was it a help that you had older brothers? You said your father always said, stay together, stay together.

Right.

Did having older brothers make it easier for you?

Of course.

OK.

Of course.

And did they take care of you?

Yes.

OK. Any one in particular? Any brother in particular?

The middle one.

The middle one?

Right. Tell me his name again.

Dov-- Dubi. Right.

Dubi, yes.

Right. We are alike. We look alike. And we think alike. My niece, what Dubi's daughter, when I'm in Israel-- and her father passed away a long time ago, 21 years ago-- we talk about parents and so on. She said, you're my father. My father is dead, now you are my father. You're the grandfather of our children.

I'm the only survivor of my whole family.

So all of them are gone.

Yeah.

Did any of them have their stories recorded like we're doing now?

In Israel, when you're going to school, in high school, everybody is writing the story about this as a family. And I have two books from either brother what they wrote.

So their children wrote about them in school?

Right.

And so that was collected into two books.

Well, one brother and another brother, the kids. I have their both books over here.

Those are very-- those are very precious documents.

Yes.

OK. But as far as recorded on video--

It's different.

This is the only-- OK.

It's a little bit different.

Thank you.

It's my pleasure.

Thank you for doing it.

Thank you.

Are any-- are there any questions I didn't ask you, that I didn't ask about, that you want people to know about?

One thing what I can say, it's easier to survive if you have family who stay together, who have relationship, OK? For instance, I'm living in the United States. My whole family is in Israel.

Your children, too?

No. No. But my family, even their children, OK, anyway with me, we're like this.

You're close.

We're very close, OK? Even we're far away geographically, but feeling, it is like we live next door.

That's a wonderful thing. Not everybody has that. But I agree with you. It is something precious to hold on to. And so many people said that when they were in such tough circumstances, and even in concentration camps, if they had a family member with them, it was easier to survive. Not always guaranteed, but easier.

No. Well, I know, for instance I don't know, some people getting-- you know.

Yeah, they lose their minds.

For instance, my father, let him rest in peace, when my mother died, he never remarried, OK? Because he said, my obligation is for my children. If I will remarrying another woman-- and my father was about 41 42 old.

He was young.

A young man. And take another woman, I have to choose between my children and my new wife, OK? He said my kids come first. And that's my feeling, too.

When he came to Israel, the Jewish organization, because my father was coming with his daughter, they took another woman, a widow, and like they got married. They were married. Then this way, she can come, too, to Israel.

When they came to Israel, my father was [INAUDIBLE] you know, she wouldn't let him. But this is a different story. But what I-- she was a little bit-- you know.

Affected.

Because she saw in her own eyes that the German took her-- shot her husband, took one of her kids-- she had two kids-- with the head on the wall, you know. very terrible story. And eventually, it affected her.

So she didn't want your father to leave her.

Correct.

Yeah. OK.

But she went-- you know, you have a lot of people like this who really got--

I want to ask two other things. Your father, when he got to Israel, did he then start talking about all of those experiences that he could not talk about when he was still in the Soviet Union?

Well, yeah and no. He was talking about how he managed to survive or to rescue the whole family. You know, I believe it is luck. I don't want to say that my father was a hero, whether he was. But after my father escaped back to Zgierz where we were living when he went back, another person saw my father manage. He tried, too. But he got caught, and he got the death-- terrible death. The German caught him, they tortured him, and so and so.

So, you know, one managed to do it, and the other not, OK? It is pure luck. It is from the mighty. We don't know.

No, we don't. We don't.

But-- or when-- with a German officer, brigadier--

[DOORBELL CHIME]

OK, let's cut for a second.

So when you were talking about the German officer-- you say your father managed, it was luck. You don't know if it's the Almighty, and you had a thought about--

I told this story to another survivor, you know, from the synagogue. And he mentions that, you know, what you said, I bet you the German officer knew that your father wants to escape from here, you know?

But we don't know. Anyway, he gave-- because my father was in the Polish army. And my father, you know, saluted the German officer. And all of a sudden, my father was thinking maybe a day or a day and a half. All of a sudden he said, you will get three days is enough. My father not know what to answer, because he was stunned, you know.

That's enough time to leave.

You know. So it's a possibility that the German officer was a nice person, and he knew what is going on, and he gave him on-- we don't know and I don't know. Nobody knows. Only the German officer, if he's alive. But I don't think he's alive. He knew what he's doing.

And this is how we managed.

You mentioned something else that I want to clarify. You said that you had photographs of your mother, and that they got lost somehow. I didn't fully understand how they got lost and then again how you found one photograph of your mother. Can you explain?

Yeah. Can we stop for a minute?

Sure.

Sure?

Sure, sure. Wait a second. OK. So I wanted to find out more about these photos. What happened?

On one of the trips when we went back from Siberia or from Ural where we was, my father was on a train in Moskva. There was a lot of people. Somebody with a blade or something, with a knife, cut the back of-- my father had on his back-- what do you call it, a backpack, and took everything out of that. And my father didn't feel it.

All the pictures from us, everything, everything was gone. We never had the picture. And then when we were in Poland, or my father was in Poland with my sister, some of our neighbors from Zgierz had a picture of my mother.

And so that's the only picture you have--

Correct.

Does that mean there are no pictures of you as a child?

No. As a child, yes, I have pictures. But not in Zgierz. This was a-- the first picture what I have, I think was in Germany with my cousin over there

OK. So none as a baby. None of Zgierz. None of anything up till then.

Nothing. Nothing.

Wow. And yet you have a story, and you have a memory. And now many more people will hear it.

Thank you. Thank you.

And I thank you. And I will say that with this, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview-

Thank you.

--with Mr. Harold Channoch Schindler--

Schindler, correct.

--on January 18, 2019 in Delray Beach, Florida. Thank you.

Correct. Thank you.

Thank you. OK. So we cut. And then what we'll do--

Speed. Whenever you're ready.

OK, Mr. Schindler. So tell me about this photograph. Who is in that photo?

It is my father. This picture was taken in Poland in 1946 or '47. My mother what is-- her picture was taken in 1938 or '37, before the war. We got the picture, and then my family in Israel meant here to replace, where they make it this one picture.

OK. So this is what you were referring to earlier, when you say that all the pictures were taken, all the photos were taken, stolen, and your neighbors in Zgierz gave that photo to you of your mother.

Right, correct.

And then from the two separate photos, they made one couple.

Correct.

Wow. Thank you. Thank you very much. Mr. Schindler, now tell us about this photograph. Who is in this photograph?

This photograph is made in 1966 when I got married. Her name is Hannah Frida [NON-ENGLISH] Katz. And this is my wife and myself [INAUDIBLE].

And your wedding date was what?

June the 6th, 1966.

Well, that's pretty easy to remember, isn't it?

Yeah.

And so this is your late wife who just recently passed away.

Right. Two and a half months ago.

Thank you for sharing that with us.

Thank you.

OK. Thanks.

Cutting.